EARLY PRINTING PRESSES AND NEWSPAPERS IN BIHAR

By

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Soon after the establishment of the General Committee of public Instruction (1823) need was felt for supplying the different educational institutions under their control with printed books in place of the comparatively rare, costly and inaccurate manuscripts, which alone were available at the time. In their meeting of the 7th April, 1824, they discussed the suggestion of Mr. Wilson, the Secretary, for the establishment of two Government Presses—one attached to the Madrasa and the other to the Hindu College. At last a press was established at Calcutta under the charge of Mr. John Tytler, a man of extensive oriental acquirements. The establishment of the press effected a great reduction in the cost of oriental publications in Calcutta so much so that it was found equally economical to transfer the business of printing to the Baptist Mission Press, leaving the work of correction and check in the same hands as before. Moreover, the operation of Government Press was also found inadequate to the demand for books. The General Committee therefore subsidised the publications of individuals at other presses also, and purchased extensively both English and oriental books for the use of various institutions.

The earliest reference to a press in Bihar is found in Emma Robert's "Scene and characteristics of Hindostan".[1] Writing about the attractions of Patna for a traveller he made the following observations (on page 132) regarding the lithographic Press there.

"The establishment of a lithographic Press, through the spirited exertions of Sir Charles D' Oyly, to whose taste for the fine Arts the Scientific world is so deeply indebted, is alone sufficient to render Patna a place of no ordinary interest to travellers in search of information. The vicinity of the province of Behar to the Rajmahal Hills, and the still wider ranges of Nepal has enabled a circle of amateurs to collect speci-

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1. The first Volume of the book was published in 1837.

mens of the rarest and most beautiful natural productions of the east. A work upon ornithology, which issued regularly from the Behar Press contains coloured drawings from living subjects of the most interesting individuals of the feathered tribe to be found on the continent of India. Such pursuits must necessarily tend to improve the taste of those who are so fortunate as to be thrown in to the Society at Bankipore ; a talent for drawing, one of the most useful accomplishments in India, may be cultivated to the great advantage under the auspices of the directors of the Press..."

No information is available about the existence of other printing presses in Bihar till we come to the year 1853. During the year a circular letter was issued to the various district officers to send a list of such books as had been published in their respective districts since the year 1847. From the reply of Mr. A. Littledale, Officiating Collector of Patna, dated the 2nd August, 1853, it is learnt that there was no printing or lithographic press in Patna. Books came into the City chiefly from Lucknow, some from Bombay and Calcutta and a few from Sasaram, in the district of Shahabad, where a printing press had been established in the year 1850 by Shah Kabir Uddin Ahmad. He, however, could not give satisfactory information as to what types of books were most sought after by the people of Bihar. He learnt from Maulvi Ahmadulla, "one of the most learned gentleman in this city " and a member of the Local Committee of Public Instruction that "the taste for literature has rather decreased than otherwise".

The name of Sasaram Press was Muthah Kobera. During the year 1852 it had published only three hundred copies of "Sayings of Khaja Meerdurd". The price of each copy was Rs. 1-8-0. Fifty copies of the book had been sold during the year.[2]

The Raja of Betiah had also a Press "for his private amusement."[3] But no newspaper or periodical appears to have been issued from Bihar till the year 1856. An arrangement had been made by the Education Department under which some space for "subjects local to Behar" was to be given in some newspapers of Benares. We get a fairly good

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2 From W. Dampier, Superintendent of Police, L. P. to Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated the 29th July, 1853.

3. *Ibid.*

account of the arrangement from the following circular[4] letter addressed to the several district officers of Bihar.

"I have despatched to your address specimen copies of two newspapers published at Benares entitled the *Aftab-i-Hind* and the *Sudhakar*.

Till arrangements can be made for the publication of a purely local Journal it is desired to secure as extended a circulation as possible for these newspapers in the Province of Behar, and I trust that you will kindly lend the weight of your official and private influence to this objeet

The newspapers will contain, as a general rule, articles of genaral interest , a place will be given, however, to subjects local to Behar only, commensurate with the support which they may obtain in the province.

Subscriptions will be received and the subscribers name registered either by myself or by my Sub-Inspector in your district Babu Har Gobind Ghose."

Mr. W. Tayler's plan of education for Bihar contained as a secondary measure the organisation of a vernacular paper "for the dissemination of sound principles, useful knowledge and the rectification of all misconception and error."[5] Subsequently when he was entrusted with the work of implementing his scheme, he made arrangements for the publication of a weekly Urdu newspaper to be called "*Akhbar-i-Behar*". On the 3rd September, 1856, Mr. Taylar moved the Government for purchasing sufficient copies of the newspaper to supply one to each public office and zila school in his division and allowing these copies to be sent free of postage. In other words, the postage was also to be paid by the Government. The price of the paper was kept one rupee a month or nine rupees per annum, if paid in advance. It was under Mr. Tayler's contemplation to reduce the price "considerably, probably one half, when the increase of circulation will admit of it."[6] But the paper had a very short career, and on the removal of Mr. Tayler from the Commissionership of Patna in September, 1857, it was abolished.

4. Patna Judge-Magistrate Records, Book No. 147, Circular No. 229, dated 8th February, 1856, from the Inspector in the Department of Public Instruction in the Province of Bihar to the judge of Patna.
5. From W. Tayler, Commissioner of the Patna Division, to the D. P. I., dated the 31st January, 1856.
6. From W. Tayler to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 26th November 1856.

By 1857, however, in Patna two shop-keepers possessed printing presses and used them "for the purpose of their own business and job work."[7] The Press of Shah Kabir Uddin Ahmad lithographed Government proclamation etc. There was one press at Muzaffarpur connected with the missionaries which printed religious books, tracts, etc. Another press there belonging to the planters "reprinted official intelligence".

In the sixties of the 19th Century the origin and growth of a number of Cultural Societies in Bihar further enlarged the activities of the Printing Presses in the province.[8] Almost all these Societies had taken upon themselves some publication work. Quite a few of them had their own presses. The Bihar Scientific Society, although primarily devoted to translation work, issued monthly newspaper of 8 pages called the "*Akhbar Akhyar*" under the joint editorship of Munshi Suraj Mal, First Grade Deputy Inspector of Schools, and Rai Sohan Lal, Superintendent of Patna Normal School.

The subscription for the newspaper was only two annas per copy. A copy of the paper was supplied to all the government aided schools in Bihar and through the personal exertions of the two above mentioned officers of the Education Department, "its contents are made known to the inhabitants of the village through the teachers and pupils or the school in which the paper is received"[9]

Soon the *Akhbar Akhyar* became very popular in Bihar. The Inspector of Schools for North-West division (comprising the districts of Bihar), S. W. Fallon, made a special mention of the newspapar in his annual report on education for the year 1868-69. According to Fallon, the news for the paper were mostly taken from the *Friends of India* and the *Englishmen.* The selection of various items of news exhibited "a judicious mixture of the useful and interesting" matters. The popular taste cared more for news regarding war and law cases. It was felt that "if only the decisions of the High Court be translated and published, the paper would command an extensive sale, and prove a source of pecuniary profit."

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7. Annual Report on Public Instruction, Bengal (1857-58), p. 147.
8. For details see my article "Origin and development of Cultural institutions in Bihar", pubilshed in the Journal of Historical Research, Volume VIII, No. 1.
9. Annual Report of S. W. Fallon, Inspector of Schools for North-west Division, for the year 1868-69, p. 238.

Fallon also liked the style of paper, which he characterised as "simple, idiomatic and concise and entirely free from the pedantry and verbosity." He quoted from a letter to the Editor published in the newspaper under the name of Syed Wahiduddin, Junior judge of Bhagalpur, expressing his opinion of the paper that it contained "much matter and few words (*Matlab bahut aur ibarat thori*)."

In his report Fallon gave a gist of all the eight issues of the newspaper which had been brought out till the time of the report. It is as follows :—

No. 1. The 1st number gives the different lines of Railways in India, made or projected, their length, traffic etc., the new description of Railway carriages on the Oudh line, with separate compartments for women and castes, receptacles for food and water, hukas tobacco, and fire, and on attendant in waiting, private bathrooms, and comports for invalids and sickmen ; the opening of a stall in the heart of native town for the sale of Railway tickets and the receipt of goods ; the trial and execution of the murderer of a European officer in the mutiny of 1857, news from Cabul, Hydrabad, Kashmir, Muscat, and Japan ; the Treaty between Russia and Bokhara ; a decision of the High Court ; and the results of the University Examination in Bombay.

No. 2. Reduction of the paper duty in Travancore ; latest intelligence from British Burma, Newzealand, and Lucknow exposure of a swindler who traded on the simplicity of people who believed that one rupee could be converted into two ; discovery of gold dust washed down by a river in Pattiala ; relief measures in Jhansi and Lallatpur ; discovery of a gold mine in Ceylon ; Famine in the North West and Rajputana ; the earthquake in Cachar ; visit of the Commissioner of Bhagalpur to Raja Har Ballabh Singh's school ; price current in Patna, High Court decision, Vernacular Scholarship Examination, subjects of Examination, rules.

No. 3. Description of the earthquake in Sylhat and Cachar ; Cabul ; the Famine, Kolapur Raja praised for his school ; descriptions of the fall of meteoric stones in Bharatpur, reduction in postage rates ; *full details and exposure of the Wahabi consplracy* ; relief measures of reduction of duty on grain in Jaipur ; the Junior Judge Syed Wahid-Uddin's letter on the Bihar Normal School newspaper ; meeting of the Bihar Scientific Society ; accident in native wedding processions ; appointments ; circular of the High Court.

No. 4. Rainfall ; liberality of the Government towards Cabul ; administration of Rampur ; letter from Junior Judge of Muzaffarpur on the Bihar Normal School newspaper ; price of Indian Cotton in England ; Chittagong ; results of the Calcutta University examination; Persia, repeal of the Transit duties in Maheri and the title of Raja confered on its chief ; Kapurtala ; the census taken in Lucknow and the successful arrangements for it ; visit of the Judge and his lady to Gaya Training School ; the new canal works in Shahabad ; accidents in native wedding processions : telegrams, course of study for vernacular scholarships and certificates.

No. 5. Treaty of commerce between Russia and Bokhara, rebellion of the Kukis ; rainfall, publications of the Society in Guzarat ; Earl Mayo's visit to the Coal mines ; purchase of oriental works by the oriental society; excellence of the administration of Bhawalpur; preservation of ancient Sanskrit works; quantity of grain exported from Lucknow, the Mahomedan Literary Society in Culcutta, the cultivation of Tea, Jute and Chinchona in India; exportation of Tea and cotton to England, the Nizam of Murshidabad's visit to England; Relief measures; hail; pleadership examination in Purnea.

No. 6. Visit of Sayed Ahmad Khan to England with his son, selected for preparation for the Civil Service, and statement of the services to his countrymen contemplated in the Sayed's visit; reduction of duty on grain; relief works in Darbhanga; Hyderabad Pleadership examination, Brahmanas and Orthodox Hindus; Female education and seclusion of Mohomedan women in India as compared with the education and liberty of Mohamedan women in Arabia; the number of new books sent out from England and imported during the year; Timur's library; the convention on Greece; *more exposures of the* Wahabi conspiracy; the gross revenue and expenditure of India; High Court decision.

No. 7. Reception of the Amir of Cabul; Afghanistan; effects of smoking opium; appointments; datailed statements of revenue and expenditure under each head, as given in the Financial Statement; new postage rates; educational notice.

No. 8. Bokhara; Presents to the Amir of Cabul; presents to his son; presents to his Chief Officers; derivation of words, secondary meanings traced from the Primary, Literary Department's opening address on the use of newspaper. The argument is that "*there can be no sympathy*

with a people and no well directed efforts for their improvement without a just knowledge of their condition, and this knowledge is supplied by newspapers, which discharge in the present day the functions of news writers and emissaries, who laid their store of information before the king or the nobleman who employed them, while the public newspaper reaches alike the peasant's hut and the tradesman's shop, the Zamindar's Cutchery and the royal Court".

Meanwhile in January 1869 Suraj Mal, Deputy Inspector of Schools and editor of the *Akhbar Akhyar*, brought out another Urdu Journal called *Chasm-i-Ilm*. Fallon does not give any details about this newspaper in his report. But from a letter in the Darbhanga Raj Archives we learn that it was "the cheapest and most useful vernacular paper."[10] The Deputy Inspector of Schools for Tirhut had suggested the purchase of 26 copies of the newspapar for the newly established Raj Darbhanga Vernacular Schools,[11] at a monthly cost of Rs. 8-8-0 only. The newspaper published articles on education, "in familiar and good Urdu" for the benefit of primary teachers and students. It was purchased by the government for each of the government Vernacular Schools.

The *Chashm-i-Ilm* continued to be published at least, till the year 1875. In its issue dated 16th April, 1875, it published an article on the Patna Wahabis entiteled "New Devices of the Wahabees". Its opening sentence was :—

"The Wahabees have in these days commenced to bring out their heads like rats from their holes........."

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10. Raj Darbhanga Archives, Educational Records, Letter No. 246 dated the (torn)... 1869, from the Dy. Inspector of Schools Tirhut to the Inspector of Schools for N. W. Division.

11. The Darbhanga Raj had established 26 Vernacular schools under its scheme of education of the year 1867. For details please see the author's articles, published in the Proceedings Vols. of the Indian Historical Records Commission.